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X.—STELLA AND THE *BROKEN HEART*.

In the prologue to the *Broken Heart*, Ford says :

“What may be here thought Fiction, when time’s youth
Wanted some riper years, was known a Truth.”¹

This interesting clue to the source of the play has not been carefully followed up. “The origin of the story on which it is founded,” says Ward, “is unknown ; but unless the Prologue’s assertion that the plot is based on fact is to be taken literally, its source is probably some nearly contemporary novel. Either Ford or the novelist from whom he borrowed made little account of historical probability in choosing Sparta as the scene of a love-tragedy which savours of mediæval Italy.”² Ellis, also, remarks that the scene is “curiously placed in Sparta,” and adds that the story “may have been taken from an Italian novel.”³

These observations and conjectures seem to me somewhat misleading. In the first place, we should consider Ford innocent until he is proved guilty. From what we know of his character, we have no good reason to doubt his veracity. From the scant humour, the gravity and artistic seriousness of his work, we may rather infer that he was the last man in the world to attempt a hoax. Of course, the words of the Prologue must not be taken too literally. We are not, by any means, to understand that Ford vouched for the truth of all the particular incidents so effectively combined for the purposes of the play, but so unlikely to occur in life in such combination. To suppose that Ford intended

¹ *Works*, London, 1869, I, 215.

² Ward, *History of English Dramatic Literature*, London, 1899, III, 79.

³ *Mermaid Ford*, new edition, 184.

his readers to believe in the historical truth of the *Broken Heart* as it stands, Spartan setting and all, is indeed ridiculous. We must concede him the license of poet and dramatist to work up the material and to adorn the tale. If we make him this reasonable concession, we shall not be puzzled by the theatrical dance and startling heart-failure of Calantha or the sensational murder of Ithocles. Ford, like his fellows of that late imitative period, gathers hints from far and wide; incidents such as these, savouring, perhaps, of mediæval Italy, may have come from different sources, and be no part of the original story. In another place, Ford requests you

“to cast your eye
Rather upon the *main* than on the *bye*.”¹

The “main” with Ford is always the “heart interest,” the crisis in the spirit. Ellis interprets the lines already quoted thus: “It is said in the Prologue that the story . . . has some foundation in fact.”² The proper inference to draw from the Prologue is, to my thinking, that the essential spiritual situation, however decked and disguised, is taken from life. Ford tells us in fairly plain English that his play presents what some years earlier was known as truth. No convention prescribed such an assurance, honest or otherwise; the audience did not expect it; Ford’s fellow dramatists did not customarily furnish it. The information is purely voluntary; since there is no apparent reason for deception, let us suppose that it is honest information.

But, if we accept Ford’s assertion of the truth of his story, we shall have to find fault with the conjectures of Ward and Ellis as to the source of it. A certain savour of mediæval Italy (to me, not perfectly distinct) has led them

¹ *Works*, I, 7.

² *Mermaid* Ford, 184.

to suspect that Ford found his material in an Italian novel. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that such was the case. This Italian novel would have supplied Ford with Italian characters and places, possibly with Italian proverbs, snatches of song, local allusions. Why did he go to the labor of converting his material—of resetting the story in Sparta? Ford was sufficiently at home in Italy; it was, in fact, his favorite scene. He knew how to handle Italian "local color," as he showed most admirably in *'Tis Pity* and *Love's Sacrifice*, which, as well as *The Fancies* and the *Lady's Trial*, he set in Italy, where they clearly belong. If he had found the story of the *Broken Heart* in an Italian novel, and had given it an English dress, we should have had no difficulty in understanding the reason for the transformation. But what motive shall we assign for his concealing an Italian love-story from an English audience under this strange Spartan disguise, and then piquing curiosity by gratuitously asserting its truth?

This question leads to another: Discarding the Italian hypothesis, can we give any satisfactory explanation of the fact that the story was so "curiously placed in Sparta," with so "little account of historical probability"? Accept Ford's assertion of the truth of the story, and the answer is evident enough. Why was Jonson's *Poetaster* set in the time of Augustus, or Dekker's *Satiromastix* so "curiously placed" in the reign of William Rufus? The *Broken Heart* is set in Sparta to veil a true English love-story from an English audience; that seems the almost inevitable explanation.

With that notion in mind, we shall have no difficulty in understanding the choice of Sparta. Why the critics should balk at Ford's Sparta is, I confess, not quite so clear to me. It is not, indeed, the historical Sparta; yet no one seems to have noticed that it had been annexed to the English imagi-

nation for some fifty years when Ford settled upon it. When Ford wrote the *Broken Heart*, Sparta had already long been a well-defined province of the sky-land of allegory and romance. The Sparta of Ford's play is the Sparta created by Sidney in his *Arcadia*, where just such events took place as are presented in the play, just such tragedies of love and hate, with just such savour of mediæval Italy.¹ In the *Arcadia* Ford found his Spartan "atmosphere" ready-made. Indeed, the action of the *Broken Heart* takes place at the same imaginary period as that of the *Arcadia*. King Amyclas of Laconia heads the list of dramatis personæ in the tragedy, and King Amyclas reigns over the Laconia of Sidney's romance. Here is no question of historical probability. Surely, the public that had devoured ten editions of the *Arcadia* before the *Broken Heart* was published would recognize their Laconia when they saw it, and infer from the prologue what I have suggested above: The germ of this drama, obscured by the conventional romantic disguise, is a true English love-story.

How close to the "truth" Ford's readers could hit, it would be idle to speculate. The fact that the story was laid in Sidney's Laconia may possibly have suggested that it had something to do with Sidney himself; if Ford was dealing with Sidney's love-story, he could have chosen no disguise more suitable than that which Sidney employed. The allegorical threads of the *Arcadia*, however, are so inextricably interwoven with pure fancy that they furnish no guide to the *Broken Heart*. Fortunately, another clear clue leads us in the same direction toward the true love-story: Ford, in his youth, took an ardent interest in the love affairs of Sidney's "Stella," then Countess of Devonshire. In fact,

¹ Compare, for example, the famous story of Argalus and Parthenia, retold in verse by Francis Quarles, in 1621.

his first literary effusion, the generally neglected *Fame's Memorial* (1606), was called forth by the death of Charles Blount, second husband of "Stella," and was dedicated to the Lady Penelope, County of Devonshire, that is, "Stella," herself. The poem is both a eulogy and a vindication. Devonshire had died broken-hearted over the disgrace he had incurred at court by his marriage with Lady Rich (Penelope), and she, at the date of this dedication, seems still to have been under a cloud of disfavor and slander.¹ Ford rushed in to champion her, actuated only by the justice of the cause.

"Let merit take her due, unfee'd I write,
Compell'd by instance of apparent right,
Nor chok'd with private hopes do I indite,
But led by truth as known as is the light." ²

The merits of the case were perhaps not beyond question. The bare facts were these:³ Penelope had been married to Lord Rich against her will; Rich was mean, brutal and jealous; then came Devonshire, "a person famous for conduct and so eminent in courage and learning, that in these respects he had no superior;"⁴ Devonshire and Lady Rich formed an illicit union; Lord Rich put away his wife; Devonshire married her. The situation evidently interested Ford greatly. He was always on the side of lovers. All errors of lovers seemed to him venial; their sins,—at the worst, splendid sins. Over the virtual adultery committed and the actual adultery forecast in *Love's Sacrifice*, even over the incest of *'Tis Pity*, he shed tears of compassion and

¹ *Works*, III; see Epistle Dedicatory of *Fame's Memorial*.

² *Ibid.*, 309.

³ *Ibid.*, 281. See also, Fox-Bourne's *Memorial* of Sir Philip Sidney, London, 1862, 376, Note.

⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 279, Note.

admiration. Truly, for him love covered a multitude of sins. The Lady Penelope evidently fascinated his imagination ; her career had been so romantic—she had loved so much, and had been loved so much.

A score of years after this first romantic defense of Stella, Ford, moved by a similar inspiration, wrote the *Broken Heart*. His purpose, once more, was to present the conflict between the rights of the heart and the conventions of society, and to champion the cause of the heart. Again, he dealt with a heroine, married against her will to a jealous and brutal husband, and pursued by a fond and faithful lover. There is a general resemblance to the Devonshire-Lady Rich affair, but there are more important differences. Possibly the most fundamental of these is, that the lady of the play preserves her virtue in spite of the importunity of the lover, and in spite of the fact that she loves him and recognizes the ideal justice of his claims. For,—a second important difference,—the lady and the lover of the play were engaged to marry before she was forced to wed the unworthy husband ; so that, in an ideal sense, she feels that she is living in adultery with her legal husband. But these differences that distinguish the situation in the play from the Devonshire-Lady Rich affair help to identify it with an earlier and more celebrated affair, the love story of Sidney and Penelope Devereux. A youth as much interested in Lady Penelope as Ford had shown himself to be would have been eager to know the particulars of her early history. The internal history of the love affair lay open to him in *Astrophel and Stella*. That he had means of access to the external facts it is scarcely necessary to prove here, since the *Broken Heart*, as I believe, demonstrates that he had possession of them. In other words, I believe that the “truth” upon which Ford asserted that the play was based is the story of Sidney’s love for “Stella,” the one appro-

priate historical character, outside the plays, in whom we know that he was vitally interested. I do not maintain that the *Broken Heart* is an allegory. It is rather the imaginative working out of a dramatic situation from real life,—a dramatic situation that in real life came to nothing. Sidney's affair with "Stella" lacked the fifth act; Ford's imagination supplied it, and something more. A brief comparison of the situation laid down in the play, particularly in the first act, with the historical facts, plus the testimony of *Astrophel and Stella*, will make this clear.

1. (a) The parents of Orgilus and Penthea, formerly at odds, became reconciled, and sealed their faith by pledging their children in marriage.¹

(b) Sir Henry Sidney and the Earl of Essex has not been on the best of terms;² but Philip Sidney was a great favorite with the Earl. Sir Henry was anxious to make a helpful family alliance. There was, on the other hand, reason to believe that Philip was to be the heir of his wealthy uncle Leicester. These considerations seem to have been influential in the betrothal of the children.³

2. (a) Before the marriage could take place, Thrasus, Penthea's father, "untimely" died. His death was fatal to the match; had he lived, the lovers would have been united.

"we had enjoy'd
The sweets our vows expected, had not cruelty
Prevented all those triumphs we prepared for,
By Thrasus his untimely death."⁴

¹ *Works*, I, 218.

² Symonds, *Sidney*, London, 1902, 36: "Writing to Lord Leicester, he (Sir Henry Sidney) couples Essex with his old enemy the Earl of Ormond, adding that 'for that their malice, I take God to record, I could brook nothing of them both?'"

³ Fox-Bourne, *passim*.

⁴ *Works*, I, 218.

(b) Essex, Penelope's father, was cut off suddenly by a strange illness. Two days before death, Essex said: "I wish him (Philip) well—so well that, if God do move their hearts, I wish that he might match with my daughter."¹ This wish, expressed on his death bed, was practically a last will and testament.—In the play Penthea reproaches her brother

"For forfeiting the last will of the dead" ²

by breaking off the match.

3. (a) Penthea's brother, moved by ambition, broke off the match and married her to a man of higher rank and greater wealth than her lover, Orgilus.

"By cunning partly,
Partly by threats, he woos at once and forces
His virtuous sister to admit a marriage
With Bassanes, a nobleman, in honour
And riches, I confess, beyond my fortunes." ³

(b) Penelope's guardian evidently thought he would make a better match for her than that desired by her deceased father.⁴ Sidney was not knighted till 1583; his means were always limited; and his hope of becoming Leicester's heir was cut off by that nobleman's marriage in 1578. Penelope's guardian, accordingly, arranged a match with Lord Rich, "inheritor of all the wealth and—said his contemporaries—of much of the vulgar and brutal disposition of his father, Lord Chancellor Rich." ⁵

4. (a) Penthea went to the altar a wholly unwilling bride:

"Beauteous Penthea, wedded to this torture
By an insulting brother, being secretly
Compell'd to yield her virgin freedom up
To him, who never can usurp her heart,
Before contracted mine.—" ⁶

¹ Fox-Bourne, 129.

² *Works*, I, 260.

³ *Works*, 219.

⁴ Fox-Bourne, 286.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Works*, I, 219.

“How, Orgilus, by promise I was thine
The heavens do witness ; they can witness too
A rape done on my truth.”¹

(b) Penelope married under violent protest. She, “being in the power of her friends, was married, against her will, unto one against whom she did protest at the very solemnity and ever after . . . the same fears that forced her to marry constrained her to live with him.”²

5. (a) Penthea’s brother interfered to protect her from her husband. At one time, indeed, he took her to his own house and told Bassanes that she was to be returned only on his good behaviour.³

(b) Similar testimony is given of the part Penelope’s brother played in the family affairs. “He (Lord Rich) forebore to offer her any open wrong, restrained with the awe of her brother’s powerfulness.”⁴

6. (a) Penthea’s husband was mean, jealous, and brutal. According to Orgilus, she was “yok’d”

“To a most barbarous thralldom, misery,
Affliction, that he savours not humanity,
Whose sorrow melts not into more than pity
In hearing but her name.”⁵

Bassanes is full of a kind of “monster love”⁶ that finds expression in mad jealousy.

(b) On the character of Lord Rich, see 3 (b) above. Also compare Sidney’s punning sonnet on Lord Rich beginning :

“Rich fooles there be whose base and filthie heart—”⁷

¹ *Ibid.*, 251.

² Fox-Bourne, 288.

³ *Works*, I, 266.

⁴ Devereux, *Lives of the Earls of the Essex*, I, 155.

⁵ *Works*, I, 219.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Complete Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, London, 1877, I, 36.

In this sonnet, Sidney speaks of the "foule abuse" inflicted upon Stella by her husband.

7. (a) At the beginning of the play Orgilus undertook a voluntary exile from Penthea's presence in order to quiet her husband and to relieve her and to calm himself.

(b) The *Astrophel and Stella* presents a series of sonnets beginning with LXXXVII, written in absence enjoined by "Stella's" sense of duty.

8. (a) Orgilus's passion took command of him; he pursued Penthea and demanded the satisfaction of his love.

"If thy soft bosom be not turn'd to marble
Thou'lt pity our calamities; my interest
Confirms me thou art mine still.

I would possess my wife; the equity
Of very reason bids me."¹

(b) Sidney, likewise, determined to pursue his love at all cost:

"No more, my deare, no more these counsels trie;
O give my passions leave to run their race;
Let Fortune lay on me her worst disgrace."²

In this sonnet, Sidney makes the romantic identification of love with virtue, which is the fundamental note in Ford's treatment of passion.

9. (a) Orgilus's passionate purpose was thwarted only by Penthea's steady clinging to honor. There is a striking parallelism of situation and sentiment between the third scene of the second act in the *Broken Heart* and the eighth song³ of the *Astrophel and Stella*.

Orgilus and Penthea met in the garden of the palace. Orgilus urged the rights of love. Penthea swore that she

¹ *Works*, I, 251.

² *Complete Poems*, I, 85.

³ *Complete Poems*, I, 179.

had been, and still was, his alone ; but she insisted that she should best show her love by giving him his liberty ; and that he would best show his merit by ceasing to pursue her. She forbade him to speak of the subject again. He departed in a fierce passion ; whereupon, she exclaimed in pity for him and for herself :

“ Honour
How much we fight with weakness to preserve thee ! ”

(b) Astrophel and Stella met in a shady grove.

“ Him great harmes had taught much care,
Her faire necke a foul yoke bare.”

Astrophel pleaded vehemently with her to grant his desire. She replied :

“ While such-wise she love denièd,
And yet love she signifièd.”

She told him that his grief hurt her more than death ; that her only comfort came from him ; that he must not make the request again nor mention it ; that putting him away hurt her as much as him. Finally—exactly expressing Penthea’s sentiment—she assured him :

“ Tyran Honour doth thus use thee,
Stella’s selfe might not refuse thee.”

She departs,

“ Leaving him to passion rent.”

Let us add to this a part of the sixty-second sonnet,¹ in which Stella expresses almost exactly Penthea’s notion of love proved by renunciation. Stella asserted :

“ That love she did, but loved a love not blind ;
Which could not let me, whom she loved, decline
From nobler course, fit for my birth and mind ;
And therefore, by her love’s authority,
Wild me these tempests of vaine love to flie,
And anchor fast my selfe on Vertue’s shore.”¹

¹ *Complete Poems*, I, 84.

When affairs reached this point, there was, from a dramatic point of view, one thing left for Sidney to do: to kill some one. Instead of doing so, however, he prosaically cured himself of love, and spoiled the drama. Worse than that, he married another woman. Clearly, it was necessary for Ford to drop Sidney there; to forget what Sidney did, and to work out what Sidney,—again from a dramatic point of view,—ought to have done. There was, moreover, one thing left for Penelope to do: to die of a broken heart. Instead of that, she muddled on for many years, and finally married again. Ford arranged these things nearer to the poetical heart's desire. It is interesting and suggestive to note here that Spenser saw the poetical necessity of Stella's death,—or rather the necessity of her poetical death, when Sidney died. In his elegy *Astrophel*, Spenser actually represents her as dying of a broken heart:

“ she staid not a whit
 But after him did make untimely haste:

 To prove that death their hearts cannot divide,
 Which living were in love so firmly tied.”¹

When Ford made Penthea die of a broken heart, he simply repeated the poetical fiction of Spenser.

This elegy furnishes another more striking bit of evidence that Penthea of the play is Sidney's “Stella.” Spenser says that the gods, seeing the two lovers, *Astrophel* and *Stella*, lying dead on the field, transformed them into one flower. This herb, he says, is called by three different names, *Starlight*, *Penthia*, and *Astrophel*. Here, in the light of all the other evidence, it is difficult to avoid making the equation: *Penthia* = *Stella* = *Penthea*.

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¹ *Works of Spenser*, London, 1902, 561.